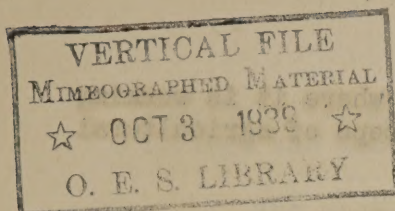


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TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF 4-H EXPERIENCE AS A  
BASIS FOR OUR VISION OF 4-H TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AHEAD\*

By  
C. B. Smith

If we omit from consideration schools and churches agricultural Extension is probably the most efficient, most accomplishing, most significant, and least-known rural institution in the United States. While we go out of our way to praise the adult educational work of other countries, foreign students coming to America find in the Extension Service one of the marvels of educational institutions with little comparable to it in any country in the world. Outside the agricultural colleges but little is known even in our own universities and denominational and teachers' colleges of this great adult and junior rural teaching movement. Many urban people listen in on the Farm and Home Radio Program put on by the Department of Agriculture, land-grant colleges, and farm organizations, cooperating, and thus have some touch with agriculture. Many more have heard of 4-H Club work through the radio and exhibits at county, State, and regional fairs but relatively few urban people know of this great rural Extension service as such or have any concept of its significance to the Nation.

This situation has come about I suppose because the Extension Service is a nonpolitical institution and furnishes its news to the public undiluted with propaganda. Extension is a carrier of information like the postal system and, as in the case of that system, one thinks of the news received and overlooks the carrier.

4-H Club work has been more fortunate in impressing itself upon the Nation than any other phase of Extension. When an adult schooled by the Extension Service attains success, credit is given the man or woman concerned and Extension's part is forgotten. When a boy or girl trained by Extension attains success, the fact that he or she is a 4-H Club member is mentioned along with the attainment, and thus the organization as well as the individual is publicized. It's somewhat like the Dionne "quins." Everyone knows about the quins but we hear little about the parents who are responsible for the quins and yet the parents are quite important.

We wouldn't lessen publicity about 4-H Club work, but in our judgment we might well give considerably more publicity to Extension as a whole. Signposts tell us of the W.P.A. and P.W.A. projects everywhere in the United States. Maybe Extension should make itself visible by signposts set

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up on each of the more than four million farms and homes where it is working as one way of getting before the public the extent and scope of agricultural extension work.

For the moment may we consider adult Agricultural Extension and 4-H Club work together. Probably the biggest thing that adult Agricultural Extension and 4-H Club work are doing for individuals and for the Nation is not so much the growing of better crops or the rearing of better live-stock or the making of better kitchens, but rather the giving of actual experience in the practice of democracy. Agricultural Extension including the junior phase of the work is probably the most democratic institution in America and has been such for the past 25 years.

No one had democracy in mind particularly when the Smith-Lever Act governing Extension was passed. Democracy wasn't being questioned at that time. But when the history of this Nation is written it will be found that the Agricultural Extension Service with its 4-H Clubs has done more to help the Nation keep its democracy on straight and practice democracy than any other institution. And it has done so not by telling people about democracy or preaching about it, but by actually practicing democracy in all phases of its work and developing its Extension program down to the smallest community and individual farm through democratic processes. And this practice of democracy in Extension since 1914 has come about because democratic processes from the outset were in the minds and hearts of those State and Federal officers administering the law and native to them.

In Extension the Federal Government doesn't tell the States what to do or else; but cooperates with them in developing a program. That is practicing democracy. In the States the Extension Service doesn't hand down to the counties a ready-made program for Extension, but rather works out a program with the people concerned sitting together around a common council table. That is practicing democracy. Within the county, too, each rural community works out with Extension the Extension program for that community and for farms and homes within it. There is no "must" program in Extension. Farmers in each county help select their Extension counselors, help finance them, help collect pertinent farm and home information, help interpret it, help work out a program of improvement based on it, and help carry that program into effect. And that is all practicing democracy.

In 4-H Club work, too, we give the youth concerned a voice in what projects they shall take up, how they shall pursue them, what their program shall be, what supplementary things they shall do educationally, socially, and recreationally. We minimize the arbitrary and encourage the cooperative. And all this gives training in the practice of democracy.

Agriculture was fortunate when the New Deal came into power to be headed up by men who also believed in democratic procedures and cooperated with the Extension Service in developing its rural program by the democratic method. Nothing more significant in government in the United States has happened since Agricultural Extension began than when the United States



Department of Agriculture decided to develop its New Deal program for farmers through the democratic processes used by the Extension Service.

The next big thing in 4-H Club work after democracy over the past 25 years is that it has held as basic throughout the period that each phase of its project work be tied in with agriculture and home economics. Farming and home-making activities are the life blood of 4-H Club work. They are what distinguishes it from all other kinds of junior organization work. Agriculture and homemaking are fundamentals of life the world over. They are the substance on which 4-H Club work has grown and attained its present high standing in the Nation. This means that 4-H Club work can never be something separate from, but must always be a part of, adult agricultural Extension work. Being tied up with the adult Agricultural extension and thus dealing with real life problems of the farm and home is what makes 4-H Club work a living, vital program instead of a play program.

There may have been in the mind of some Extension directors occasionally the thought that 4-H Club work might like to separate itself from general Agricultural Extension and stand on its own. Sometimes 4-H Club forces have felt they were being restrained in the development of 4-H Club work or given minor consideration by their administrative officers. In our thinking it would be a vital mistake for 4-H Club work to be made something separate from adult Extension. There is something stimulating and instructive to youth in doing a man's job. Know you not I must be about my father's business means something to youth. It is our fervent hope that in the next 25 years as in the past 4-H Club work may be maintained in the Extension Service as the junior phase of the whole adult Extension program. It is our hope, too, that Extension directors may not hold a too restraining hand on the future development of this popular phase of their Extension organization. If the people of the Nation want 4-H Club work in increasing degree and are willing to finance it they should be given it. That again is democracy.

We know the desire of Extension directors for a well balanced Extension Service with all divisions of the Service keeping well abreast of each other and that is something worth striving for. To bring this about, however, may mean a little larger staff giving their time wholly to club work, or a little larger proportion of the time of the regular supervising and county staff given to club work.

In all our years in the Extension Service we have never heard complaint from rural people or anyone else that too large a proportion of the finances and time of the Extension Service were going into 4-H Club work. We have heard the regret expressed at times that not more time and effort were given this phase of extension. It is our feeling that businessmen, farmers, and legislators are awaiting the request of Extension in order that they may support an enlarged program for 4-H Club work throughout the Nation. Each State Extension director will know best when the time is ripe to go forward in this field. For the good of democracy, for education's sake, and the good of the Nation we hope the opportune time in each State may be near at hand.



Another thing that rates high in 4-H Club work, standing up close or even on a par with democracy and worthy of mention in this 25-year paper, is the value of club work as a teaching device. There is nothing quite like it or comparable to it in our whole educational system. The club program like the adult program is based first on some real need of the community or need on the individual farm or in the home. The club member through his or her club project does something to meet a local situation. Club members deal with something real - not imaginary; something they can see, touch, and handle as well as reason about. The club member uses his hand and equipment to accomplish the work required. He uses his judgment as to when and how deep to plow and cultivate; when and how to harvest and market; when, what, and how to feed his stock. His eyes and hands are trained to judge the perfect form of product, he exhibits his product and explains his work to others; he cooperates with others, he writes a report. In fact the club member uses all his or her senses and faculties -- mind, hands, eyes, taste, smell, touch, in carrying out his or her club project, and that is what gives 4-H Club work its great educational value. That is why club work has its great appeal, that is why it has grown so rapidly. It educates and gives training to the whole man.

All unconsciously almost, we have stumbled onto a way of education in 4-H Club work that is something educators have been looking for through the ages -- a life situation and need, doing something to meet the need; exercising all the faculties and senses in carrying out the project; explaining the work to others through speech, making a report through the written word, analysing, reasoning, doing, explaining, recording, utilizing all our faculties and consequently 4-H Club members growing in knowledge and wisdom. Is it to be wondered at the people want more of it and regret they didn't have this work when they were young?

Of course in the 25 years we have been working together in Extension the club program as initiated by our founding fathers has been added to considerably. We give emphasis today not only to the agricultural or home-economics phases of the club project, but to the embellishments we have added to it as we have enlarged our concept of the purpose of club work. No club project today is complete unless it carries with it something of the social, the recreational, the cultural side of life. Much of the value of club work would be lost without these humanizing features. Without conscious design also 4-H Club work has assumed during the years a spiritual trend that promotes honesty, fairness, and integrity in life, an attitude of reverence toward worth-while things. I mention these matters casually and without further comment at this time, since my paper is beginning to lengthen out; besides you all are aware of them and know their value.

May we look now for a moment and see, if we can, what the next 25 years may hold for 4-H Club work.

Agricultural Extension work will grow and with it 4-H Club work. Extension work and 4-H Club work will grow because they pay the people big dividends on the investment. It is not just a dead tax. It is a kind of investment that actually puts back into the pockets of rural people as well



as the people of the whole Nation more than it takes out of them. Extension with its 4-H Club work is about as certain of Federal and State and county financial support in the future as is the support of these agencies for the public schools or rural free delivery of the mails or any other thing the people have gotten used to, found good, and want to continue.

Extension and 4-H Club work in their journey onward may take a zigzag course like a ship at sea, but they will constantly go forward to a port of destination. There will be no stopping place in this work until this form of adult and junior education reaches all rural people, including all rural youth and the youth of all rural cities and towns, and indirectly influences the whole Nation and nations abroad. The next 25 years should see more than two million rural youth enrolled annually in 4-H Club work in these United States and a million members more in foreign countries.

Adult education is significant, but rural-youth education begun early and continued through life is still more significant. Extension directors know this and will increasingly direct their attention to the early beginnings or junior phase of Extension.

We know that under emergency pressure county agricultural agents, and to a lesser extent also home demonstration agents, are likely to slight their work with juniors in order more nearly to meet the pressure from adults. That is one reason why Extension directors will put more of their funds into county club agents or assistant agents who give their whole time to 4-H Club work since 4-H Club agents are rarely diverted from their jobs by emergency work. Foundations in Extension shouldn't be slighted for superstructure, or club work slighted for adult work. Both should go forward together.

We have much technical efficiency in Extension and club work. We know how to grow cotton and corn, the place of legumes and livestock in farming. We know how to plan meals and construct clothing. We know how to organize for the Extension job and prepare Extension budgets. We have put into Extension and club work some vision and idealism, and all these are important. Our greatest needs in the future are, without lessening our efforts at efficiency in farming and homemaking, to bring into Extension and club work still larger vision, still more idealism. We know there is mud and decay, sordidness and greed in the world, but there are also green fields, sunshine, June days, music, the beauties of nature, and the gracious things of life. Shall we not in the next 25 years point these fine things out and stress them in a still larger degree with our local leaders and the farm people and rural youth we work with.

The next 25 years in our thinking will see our State leaders in club work spending much time with every county agent and local leader making clear the ultimate objective of all this work with youth - the efficient farmers and homemaker, the cultured man and woman, the understanding citizen, the good life. These are the things we are striving for in 4-H Club work, and every man or woman who works in the 4-H Club field should have and should impart a vision of these objectives as the goal of 4-H Club work.



Teach the local leaders how to be efficient on the project, but be sure he or she also has the vision and knows what it is all about and the end product we are striving for.

As our vision of the purpose of 4-H Club work unfolds to us from year to year and this purpose grows bigger and more important, we shall need to increase our own abilities and understanding as club leaders and supervisors of club work. This means that all of us may well follow the ancient practice of taking at least 1 year off in 7 to supplement our knowledge with new learning and appreciation of the worth-while things in life. To this end, we hope many Extension agents may take an occasional year off to go back and assume full responsibility for running the old farm and becoming a neighbor to farm people again. There is nothing that gives one more understanding as to the problems and longings of farm people than a year of full responsibility for running a farm. When we draw a salary that is paid regularly whether it rains or shines, we in time are likely to forget just what farm life is, just how many hours it takes to raise a bushel of wheat, and just how many bushels of wheat it takes to pay for our dinner on the dining car. A year off to run a farm or farm home may be worth as much or more to making you an understanding Extension worker as a year in the university.

May we state now, in somewhat briefer paragraphs the particular things we think the next 25 years hold for 4-H Club work: Continued growth in membership, with a probable ultimate annual club enrollment of around 2,500,000 and an average tenure of 3 years.

An ever increasing number of county club agents and assistants giving practically their whole time to the promotion of 4-H Club work. There must be enough workers to do the job no matter how big the job is.

An increasing amount of time given to 4-H Club work by all county agents and home demonstration agents.

4-H Club work will continue as the junior phase of adult agricultural extension dealing with efficient ways in agriculture and rural home-making as basic to its unique place in the national educational system but adding to these as always the educational, the social, and the cultural side of life.

4-H Club supervisors and State leaders must always give local leaders help in organizing and carrying out their club projects, but in the future they will make certain to local leaders in still larger degree the objectives, ideals, and ultimate aims of all 4-H Club work, viz. the efficient farm and homemaker, the cultured man or woman, the understanding citizen, the good life.

A continuation of democratic procedures in 4-H Club work. With rural youth practicing democracy as in 4-H Club work, the United States will ever remain a democracy and a free people.



An international association of 4-H Club workers with Extension directors, club supervisors and delegates, 4-H Club members meeting together occasionally in conference in various countries of the world for the promotion of morale in club work and good will among all the nations of the earth.

May we close with the thought that 4-H Club work has a great mission in the world. It is supplementing the public schools and the church in training the rural youth of the Nation in technical efficiency, in democratic processes, in character building, citizenship, and fine wholesome living.

Rural youth are, perhaps, the most significant group of young people in America. They are the ones that will inherit the farms of the Nation and produce the food and fiber required for all our people. Their surplus number will overflow from rural areas to the cities carrying with them ambition, vigor, the will to work, training in thrift, and a knowledge of what struggle in life means - a sense of the significant things of life.

The thinking of rural youth will determine the culture and ideals of all rural life and have an ever-increasing influence for good on the ideals and thinking of urban life.

4-H Club work comes in contact with these rural youth at the most impressionable period of their life. What 4-H Club leaders think, what 4-H Club leaders do, the standards of life they have, the ideals they strive for, will in large measure be imparted to 4-H Club members and be carried with them throughout life wherever they go. That is why 4-H Club leaders will continue to fit themselves the better to guide and carry on their work. They realize their responsibility to youth and the Nation. That is why State and National legislators and county commissioners are so willing to financially support 4-H Club work. That is why 4-H Club work will double in membership and importance in the next 25 years. Keep 4-H Club work out of politics. Keep it clean. Keep it a part of adult agricultural extension and in touch with the soil. Keep its consecrated leaders of men and women and it will continue the most significant rural institution we have in America.

